



STATE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

East Central Region

BACKGROUND

Since 1999, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs and public universities including Northern Illinois University have been collaborating with business, government and civic leaders throughout Illinois to *"establish a consensus on a long term economic development strategy cognizant of the competitive position of the state's regions and the needs of commerce and industry."* State and Regional Development Strategy Act. 20 ILCS 695.

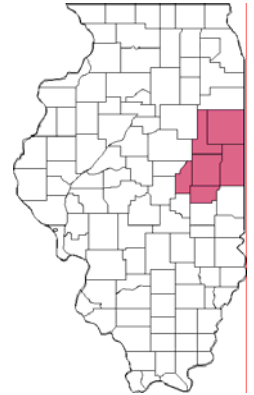
During calendar year 2000, the five university partners surveyed over 3,100 individuals by direct mail and spoke with 950 participants at 19 summit meetings held around the state. From the surveys and summit meetings, a common set of 15 strategic goals and 40 development objectives were articulated.

In 2001, the university partners held an additional 47 meetings in the 11 regions of the state where more than 1,100 stakeholders participated, contributing 4,004 volunteer hours to brainstorming strategies to achieve development objectives. The universities catalogued over 430 project suggestions for improving the economic characteristics of the regions and the state. About half of these programmatic, administrative, and legislative strategies were judged suitable, feasible, and acceptable for implementation, assuming of course implementation financing is located.

Continued on page 4

THE REGION

The six county [Champaign, Douglas, Ford, Iroquois, Piatt and Vermillion counties] East Central Illinois region is a sparsely populated area of 4,356 square miles. The population density of 77 persons per square mile is slightly more than one-third of the Illinois average of 217 persons per square mile. Champaign county is home to more than half of the region's population. Only two other cities, Danville and Rantoul, have populations greater than 10,000.



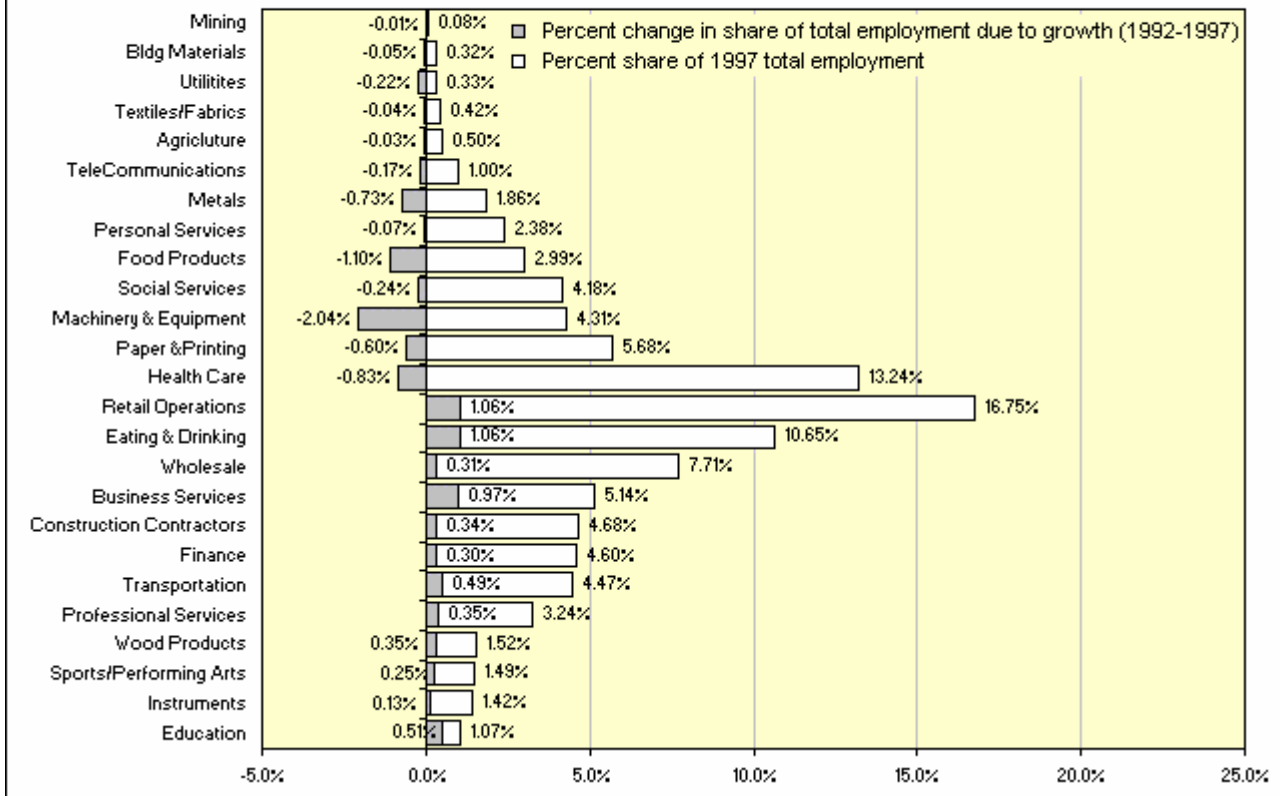
The region has been characterized by slow growth for at least the last two decades. Between 1990 and 2000, the population grew by 1.2%, with none of the counties experiencing a population growth even comparable to the over 6% increase in population for the state. Some counties experienced population decreases—Vermillion county lost over 4,300 residents (a 4.9% decrease) between 1990 and 2000. Population projections for the region indicate modest growth rates similar to those projected for the State. Champaign County is projected to be the growth center for the region.

Population and Labor Force in the East Central Region

County	Population ¹		Population Change (1990 to 2000)	Labor Force ² 2000
	1990	2000		
Champaign	173,025	179,699	3.7%	99,252
Douglas	19,464	19,922	2.4%	13,016
Ford	14,275	14,241	-0.2%	6,710
Iroquois	30,787	31,334	1.8%	15,984
Piatt	15,548	16,365	5.3%	8,399
Vermillion	88,257	83,919	-4.9%	38,957
Total	341,356	345,480	1.2%	182,318

The service sector dominates employment among residents of the East Central region. Employment in the service sectors has doubled since the 1970's and represents over one-half of total employment. The dominant service sub-sectors are health and retail operations. Manufacturing employment increased slightly but decreased as a share of total employment.

Change in Share of Employment East Central Region



VISION/PRIORITIES STATEMENT

A vision statement provides the ideal characteristics for the region. In spring 2000, regional stakeholders, including business, civic, and government leaders, participated in a summit at Allerton Conference in Monticello, Illinois to develop a vision statement for the East Central region. Participants were presented with information on the economy of the region and initial results from a development survey as background to develop the vision for the future. This information was used to paint a picture of the region, as it exists today. Background information on the “new economy” was also presented to provide ideas about possible changes in the national economy.

Based on background information and their own experience and expertise, participants were asked to identify characteristics that would describe their ideal

regional economy of the future. The vision for the East Central region, which was developed at the summit, is:

The East Central region of Illinois will be a place that is characterized by employers who offer solid benefit packages to recruit and retain employees and training programs to empower workers to bring needed skills to the workplace; a quality of life that attracts former residents back to the region; an integrated economy that includes “low tech” workforce; and an educated workforce that includes those basic skills, technical skills and college educations; and local school districts that are less reliant on property taxes. The area will have an equitable distribution of benefits and geographically and socially; a workforce that is prepared and ready, through job training in place (basic job skills, life skills), just-in-time training and continuing education; an

infrastructure that includes transportation, technology and communications across the region, moving workers to jobs and providing connections to metro areas; value-added manufacturing and development opportunities resulting from public/private partnerships; a diversified local economy that blends the “old economy” with the “new economy;” and institutions and government entities that are responsive to economic development opportunities. It will also have a regional (multi-county) approach to promoting business opportunities and the quality of life of the area; a modern, high quality infrastructure in counties outside Champaign County, particularly as to technology, energy, communications and transportation; and incentives for businesses to adopt new technologies. Finally, the East Central Region will have local crime and public safety; a strong public transportation system; involved and informed citizens; a high quality of life that includes diversity, accessibility, the arts, restaurants, services, education, transportation, parks and recreational activities; managed and planned growth; an equitable local tax base that supports both retention of existing businesses and attracts new and balanced growth; accessible and affordable housing with a high prevalence of home ownership; and preserved prime farmland and communities that are stewards of the environment.

REGIONAL STRATEGIES

In 2001, summit meetings were held in the East Central region to discuss what regional actions are needed to support the regional vision statement. Participants developed and then prioritized strategic goals and objectives.

A principal focus for the summit was brainstorming ideas and suggestions—programmatic, administrative or legislative actions—that would enable economic development in the region. Summit participants were divided into three groups to discuss actions that were needed at the regional level. Building on the prior year’s process, the three groups focused on regionalism, sustainable development, and workforce development.

A key expectation of the entire economic development strategy process was that the summits would build cohesion among the region's public and private leaders. The discussions would develop regional actions that would serve as ‘springboards’ in encouraging regionally oriented economic development. Some of the ideas included the following:

Goal: Promote technology transfer and commercialization efforts

- Strengthen the partnership between local business/industry/local government and the University of Illinois research park to create an environment for more business locations in east central Illinois.

Goal: Support retention of Illinois’ diverse base of firms

- Develop a strong retention program that provides services to existing businesses to help them compete.
- Provide training/retraining for employment.
- Develop a regional marketing plan that will educate business on current resources available to them in the region.

Goal: Adopt modern business practices in government, including digital technology

- Assess and inventory what local governments are doing regarding e-government.
- Create regional forums to pool resources and coordinate activities.
- Provide funds to local governments to improve e-government initiatives and fund leadership programs.

Goal: Support regional coordination and cooperation among development organizations

- Use the six-county region as a base to develop broader regional initiatives.

Goal: Coordinate regional land use and balanced growth

- The University of Illinois should organize workshops to help each county plan for preserving agricultural lands.
- Implement land-use zoning regulations on drainage, development of easements, residential development and property rights.
- Outline requirements and guidelines for small communities.

PROJECTS BEING IMPLEMENTED

Year 2002 involves project development and implementation. To encourage regional leadership to address regional issues, DCCA has provided the University with funds to undertake research, provide brokering/advocacy, package grants, or offer technical assistance in support of the region's strategies. Projects that were funded were projects that build the capacity of development organizations regionally and statewide.

The University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign's Laboratory for Community Development, along with the University of Illinois at Springfield, is managing four projects in the East Central region. These efforts build on the priorities identified at the regional summits in the previous years and are designed to support local efforts while fostering a sense of regional partnership among participants. The goal of many of these projects has been to bring people in the region together to build capacity for regional cooperation and development.

Goal: Effective Participation by Leaders and Citizens in Economic Development Planning and Implementation

Regional Advisory Board

The project will develop a model of grassroots input, via an advisory committee, that will benefit the region and has application across the state. This project addresses a need expressed by participants in the regional planning sessions: "enable leaders and citizens to effectively participate in economic development planning and implementation." The project will provide a report that describes the process used to broaden participation and summarizes the obstacles to citizens' participation in economic development planning.

Goal: Effective Development of Infrastructure to Take Advantage of the New Economy ***Telecommunications 101 Seminar***

The project supported a regional telecommunications seminar and provided scholarship for attendance by individuals in the region. The seminar, entitled "Telecommunications 101: The Evolution of the Revolution in Communications," addresses the telecommunications industry and how the new technology works. The seminar provided a professional development opportunity for economic development leaders in the region allowing them to increase their technical knowledge about the industry

Goal: Effective Development of Infrastructure to Take Advantage of the New Economy ***Telecommunications Infrastructure Needs Study***

In an effort to help local leaders plan for and manage the telecommunications infrastructure, the project will document telecommunications needs in the region. An instrument to solicit information regarding local needs and a report summarizing the telecommunication infrastructure needs provided. This information will help the region and other regions in the state prepare for the roadblocks and opportunities that they might encounter as they build or enhance their telecommunications infrastructure.

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In 2002, the fourth year of this five-year process, the majority of efforts are being directed to managing these strategies to completion. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs identified and is supporting 45 of the projects that produce specific products or services of benefit to all the regions. These initiatives will increase the knowledge base, document innovative practices/techniques, promote professional development, or shape institutional structure.

¹ Data source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990 and 2000.

² Data source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, 2000.